

## The Victorian Government will implement a state-wide ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags by November 2019.

The ban applies to ALL retailers – including supermarkets, greengrocers, bakeries, pharmacies, clothes stores, restaurants, cafes, markets, food outlets, and many more.

The *Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning* has engaged the **National Retail Association (NRA)** to help retailers' transition away from lightweight plastic bags.

### THE BAG BAN EXPLAINED FOR BUSINESS

*Pictures are examples only*

#### WHY IS THE BAN BEING INTRODUCED?

Victorians have used over 1 billion plastic shopping bags every year. The majority of these bags end up in landfill and around 10 million end up as litter, polluting our environment and endangering our wildlife.

The impacts of plastic pollution are a real concern to the Victorian Government and community. Since announcing the ban in October 2017, the Victorian Government has received over 8,000 submissions from the public regarding plastic pollution, with 96% in favour of a ban on lightweight plastic bags.

This ban is just the **first step** in the Government's broader agenda to reduce single-use, unnecessary and problematic plastics. Legislation to give effect to the ban is currently being prepared for introduction into the Victorian Parliament.

#### WHO DOES THE BAN APPLY TO?

The ban applies to any person or business that sells goods in trade or commerce - including online stores and markets.

The legislation also prohibits any person (such as a supplier or manufacturer) from providing false or misleading information about whether a bag is compliant.

#### WHEN DOES IT COME INTO EFFECT?

From November 2019, retailers will not be allowed to supply lightweight plastic shopping bags in Victoria.

It will be illegal for:

- a retailer to supply a banned plastic bag;
- a person who supplies or manufactures plastic bags to give false or misleading information about banned bags.

Retailers should cease buying banned bags as soon as possible and remove any existing stock before the ban comes into effect.

If you are left with unused stock once the ban comes into effect, you cannot provide these to customers and compensation is not available.

#### WHICH BAGS ARE BANNED?

The ban will apply to all lightweight plastic shopping bags with a **thickness below 36 microns**, including degradable, biodegradable and compostable bags.

Retailers will not be allowed to provide banned bags to customers, whether new or reused.

#### WHICH PLASTIC BAGS ARE ALLOWED?

The ban will NOT apply to the following bags:

- Produce bags used for unpackaged foodstuffs
- Garbage bags & bin-liners
- Dog waste or nappy bags
- Essential product packaging (eg. bread bag)

Retailers cannot use these bags as substitutes for banned bags.

#### WHICH ALTERNATIVE BAGS ARE ALLOWED?

- Paper or cardboard bags
- Cloth, jute or hessian bags
- Non-woven reusable bags
- Heavyweight reusable plastic bags



#### WHAT IF WE DON'T COMPLY?

To ensure that all retailers are on an even playing field, and that real change is accomplished, fines will apply. Under the legislation there will be two offences that will attract fines for non-compliance:

**Supply offence:** Penalties will apply to retailers providing a banned plastic bag to another person to use to carry goods the retailer sells from the retailer's premises.

**Information offence:** Penalties will apply to a person who supplies or manufactures plastic bags who gives information that the person knows, or reasonably ought to know, is false or misleading (or withholds information) about the composition of a banned bag, or whether or not a bag is a banned plastic bag.

Significant financial penalties will apply for non-compliance.



## WHAT SHOULD BUSINESSES DO?

### 1 CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES

Each business has unique needs and costs, and you should weigh up the **best long-term option** for your business, such as:

- not offering a bag at all
- paper or cardboard bags
- non-woven “green” bags
- cloth or hessian bags
- a combination of above.

Visit [www.vicbagban.com.au](http://www.vicbagban.com.au) to see real-life examples of the alternative options other retailers are using.

If you decide to use heavyweight reusable plastic bags, ask your bags supplier to provide written evidence of the bag’s thickness in microns (µm). If you are unsure, please contact the NRA on 1800 817 723.

**Fines apply to suppliers** if they provide false or misleading information (or withhold info) about banned bags.

### The risks of using ‘barely-legal’ plastic bags

The NRA does NOT recommend that retailers use plastic shopping bags **close to the minimum thickness** as your business could be exposed to substantial risks such as:

- inconsistent thicknesses across the bag could risk non-compliance
- having to defend the bags because they appear too similar to the one it replaced
- missed opportunity to reduce cost burdens
- 96% of submissions to Government were in favour of a ban (strong indication of consumer preference)
- Read more at: [www.vicbagban.com.au](http://www.vicbagban.com.au)

Labelling on plastic bags such as “compliant”, “reusable” or “bag ban approved” may not be proof of compliance.

### 2 CONSIDER BAG FEES

You cannot supply or charge for banned bags but many businesses across Australia now charge a small fee for more sustainable bags. It is your choice whether to charge customers for bags, but retailers should consider the long-term benefits such as reducing business costs. Bag fees should be fair and in line with industry standards.

NRA research has found that consumers are more willing to pay for paper, jute, hessian and cloth bags, but are reluctant to pay for plastic bags of any thickness. In addition, retailers around Australia have witnessed up to a 90% drop in total bag consumption when fees are introduced with a plastic bag ban, as more consumers remember their own bags or refuse a bag for small purchases.

### 3 PHASE OUT EXISTING STOCK

Retailers should cease buying banned bags as soon as possible and remove any stock before November 2019.

If you are left with unused stock at the ban deadline, you cannot provide these to customers. You can recycle soft plastics at a local recycler. Contact your local government to find out more about recycling facilities near you.

### 4 TRAIN YOUR TEAM

A critical element of managing the ban in your business will be to prepare and train your team, particularly those who have regular contact with customers, such as checkout operators and customer service staff. Start to prepare your staff as soon as possible so that they know the law, get familiar with your new range of bags, and can answer customer questions. **Access the free training kits:** [www.vicbagban.com.au](http://www.vicbagban.com.au)

### 5 INFORM YOUR CUSTOMERS

Although the Victorian Government is providing a public education campaign, retailers should be prepared to handle customer queries and objections. Start to inform your customers at least 1 month before the ban so they are well-prepared for the change. We recommend displaying the official VIC Bag Ban signage in your store or near the point-of-sale. **Download official signage:** [www.vicbagban.com.au](http://www.vicbagban.com.au)

If you decide to introduce bag fees, we recommend giving your customers plenty of notice so they can be prepared. You may even choose to reward your regular customers with a free reusable bag for an introductory period while reminding them to bring this bag to avoid fees in the future.

### HELP FOR RETAILERS

The NRA has created a dedicated website of resources to assist retailers during the transition including:

- official signage to display in-store
- factsheets in multiple languages
- training kits for your team
- real-life case studies and pictures of what other retailers are doing

The NRA is also visiting retailers in over 100 shopping precincts across Victoria to offer personalised information and advice to retailers.

**Go to the website:** [www.vicbagban.com.au](http://www.vicbagban.com.au) or call the NRA Tollfree Hotline: 1800 817 723